Futility

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Futility

by kooprdoodl

Summary

After surviving by his downed airplane for weeks, Overgård's persistence pays off when his distress beacon suddenly glows solid green. A helicopter appears in the horizon and spots his frantic signaling. But as it attempts to land, a violent gust sends it spiraling into the hillside. From the wreckage, he pulls out the only survivor: a gravely wounded man.

"Will Graham" reads his ID card.

A retelling of *Arctic* where, instead of the woman, Will Graham is the sole survivor of the helicopter crash.

He knows that Hannibal is here.

Notes

I recommend watching Arctic (2018) and NBC Hannibal before reading. There will be spoilers for both.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“No…”

Overgård races to the smoking wreckage. The red helicopter rests on its roof, tail snapped in two and black shards of propeller scattered across the white hillside. It takes several tries to force open the mangled door. When it finally gives, a body tumbles out. He quickly flips the person over and freezes at the sight. Whoever this was is unrecognizable amid the pulpy crimson and deep fissures littering their face. Overgård’s eyes are glued to the streams of blood oozing and dribbling onto the snow. There’s no heartbeat behind its movement.

A low groan disrupts his macabre stupor. He scrambles into the upturned cockpit and reaches for the man hanging limply by his seatbelt.

“Hey. Hey!” He pats the man’s shoulder but gets no response. “Can you hear me?” Panic rising, he presses shaky fingers to the side of the man’s throat.

It’s warm.

And within that warmth is a pulse—weak, yet steadily and stubbornly beating on.

Life.

The knowledge blooms warmly in his chest.

He tentatively feels along the man’s spine. Each vertebra seems intact and in-line with the other. Even so, he hesitates to move him. But the strained, wheezy breaths escaping his slack mouth are enough to scare Overgård into action. He draws his knife and begins sawing at the nylon.

As the fibers give way, he tries to brace his shoulder up against the man’s torso. But when the seatbelt across his lap snaps free, they both collapse in a tangled heap. Overgård grunts as he drags himself from beneath the smothering deadweight and rolls him onto his back.

Throughout all this maneuvering, the man makes no indication that he felt any of it. Overgård presses his fingers back over the pulse point and is relieved to still find it thumping away. Eyes sweeping over the man’s body, he spots a dark stain seeping through the fabric on his abdomen. He hurriedly unzips the navy blue jacket and lifts the thermal to reveal a deep gash in the man’s stomach. He clamps a hand over it and begins scouring the many compartments lining the interior.

“Where’s your medical kit?” he demands. But all he gets is a soft grumble and unconscious roll of the head. Then hope washes over him when, from out of the final compartment, falls a first aid kit.

To the best of his basic training, he flushes and applies disinfectant to the wound before deciding to staple it shut. When the first surgical staple pierces in, he flinches at the sudden forcefulness and watches the man's face. But the only reaction is a flick of his eyes beneath closed lids. Reassured, he continues stapling until the wound is sealed shut. He then applies a generous amount of gauze and zips him back into his jacket.

Metal rattles as the storm closes in. With a loud grunt, Overgård shoves the door closed. In his frantic search for medical supplies, he recalls catching a glimpse of a food compartment. He opens it up and laughs in ecstasy.

Styrofoam cups of instant noodles topple out. His stomach growls as he ogles the delectable labels. There are even a few plastic utensils scattered in the mix.

No longer able to resist, he ravenously tears into one of the cups. Clawing out the contents, he sinks his teeth into the freeze-dried chunk and crunches away. After subsisting so long on purely raw trout, he moans at how tasty the spices are on his tongue. The starches and salt also satiate some sort of screaming deficiency within him. But it's not enough. It takes all his mental fortitude to stop himself from tearing into another one. Or all of them.

He realizes too late that his fingers are still coated in the man's drying blood, though disgust doesn't hit him as hard as he thought it would. In fact, he feels nothing.

After counting his new rations, he decides to check on the man. This time, he truly looks at him.

With dark curls peeking out from beneath his beanie and cradling his reposed face, the man's features appear almost angelic, like that of an ancient beauty whose form was reverently documented in marble. A well-groomed beard dusts his delicate jaw. Overgård instinctively puts a grimy hand to his own beard, bushy and unkempt, and feels embarrassed of his own bedraggled state. How long has it been since the last time he had a proper bath or even brushed his teeth?

He's mortified to realize that he can't remember. With a sigh, he takes one last look at the younger man's face, unsure if it'll be gray with death the next time he sees it, and settles on his back, shoulder to shoulder with this stranger.

Staring at the leather seats bolted above them, cruel reality abruptly hits him.

Fuck!

This shouldn't be happening. He shouldn't even be here. They had *found* him, he was going to be saved, and yet—and yet—

He releases a shuddering breath when he feels hot tears trickle down the creases by his eyes. There's no point in lamenting. Besides, the rescue effort will be renewed.

As the temperature plummets and winds buffet the tiny helicopter, Overgård steadies his foggy breaths and wills himself to sleep.

Tomorrow.

They'll be here tomorrow.

Eyes closed, he can no longer ignore a peculiar scent that causes his nose to twitch. Surely the man could've picked a better aftershave. He snorts in annoyance. It must've sat too long in the bottle.

He doesn't remember dreaming or seeing the blurry silhouette of a ship. It gradually melds into a house adrift on a sea of fog.

Chapter End Notes

That scene in Arctic of Mads chomping on raw instant noodles… Perfection.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

> With an undignified series of grunts, Overgård manages to pull Will onto the passenger bench of his airplane.

"Will Graham" was printed on his American driver's license. A sudden gust blew away the few bills he had in his wallet. Overgård chuckled as he watched them flutter away. Perhaps they could've been used for kindling. The only noteworthy item was a folded photo of dogs seated on a porch.

His mouth parted as he counted them. Seven! All different sizes and mixes of breeds.

He searched the wallet's pockets and then all of Will's, but he had no other possessions aside from a pair of shattered glasses.

Checking for frostbite revealed that Will had a wedding ring, but he couldn't find a single photo of his wife or even his kids, if he had any. Perplexed, Overgård re-folded the dog photo and placed it alongside the ID in Will's jacket pocket.

Once the weather cleared, he tethered the plethora of new supplies to the sled, all of which were found in the trunk of the helicopter. Overgård had laughed when he discovered it. In his weakened state, there was no way he could've carried a full grown man all the way back to his plane. He'd even considered using one of the helicopter's doors as a platform to drag Will along. After pulling the sled free from the wreckage, he gasped when he spotted a propane tank and its stove attachment.

He rushed back to the body of the pilot, who was already covered in a thin layer of snow, and opened his jacket. Fumbling through the pockets, he felt it.

"Yes, yes!"

He clutched the lighter in his quaking hands. Unable to resist, he quickly jabbed the button until a weak flame stuttered to life.

For the first time in weeks, he felt not only genuine hope but excitement. He couldn't wait to get home and boil some soup, drink its simmering broth, finally warm his numb hands and feet on something other than his own meager body heat, and—

Home.

The ensuing cackle was merely a tortured wheeze.

Even if only in his head, he had just called that cursed airplane his "home."

With a dry smile, he shook his head and swapped the lighter for his Sharpie.

“2 ALIVE – VALLEY DUE SOUTH,” was scrawled onto the white paint by the door.

Panting hard, Overgård wipes the sweat from his brow while collapsed on the floor of the plane. After catching his breath, he rises to his knees and unzips Will’s jacket. Carefully lifting up the layers of clothing, he studies the soiled gauze sticking to the wound via dried blood. Peeling it away reveals the underlying skin to be an angry pink and puffy around the edges. With a frown, he digs out the bottle of antiseptic from the medical kit and marks the liquid’s place on the bottle. He pours several capfuls into the gash before marking the remainder.

There are about four more doses left.

Four more days.

“Mmnnghh.”

Overgård’s eyes are glued to Will’s face as he stirs a softly bubbling soup of instant noodles and cubes of trout.

Sadly, it seems Will is unable to open his eyes or do much more than weakly writhe. Overgård stamps down his concern and puts on a smile instead.

“Good morning, Will.”

Will’s head rolls toward the direction of his voice. “Hhnnn…”

“Will, can you hear me?”

Then, at last, Will blearily opens his eyes a fraction of the way. Overgård scrutinizes the sliver of stormy gray irises. He can’t tell if Will is seeing him. He takes one of Will’s gloved hands and places it over his own.

“Will? Although you may not feel like it, I need you to squeeze my hand.” Overgård mimics the gesture with his free hand. Will stares blankly until finally Overgård feels a tentative pressure to his enclosed fingers. “More, more... Good.”

Overgård can’t help the pleased grin that tugs on his lips as he tucks Will’s hand back into the spare sleeping bag. Will’s grip was almost painful. He still has time.

“Pi…lot…?” Will murmurs.

Overgård pauses. In his mind’s eye, he sees the frozen man lying half buried in the snow. He found the pilot’s ID, but it was in a language indecipherable to him. Clipped to the windshield was a photo of him and his wife, both smiling in the sunshine with their giggling toddler. Overgård tucked the painful photo into a pocket over the man’s heart.

“I’m sorry.”

Will closes his eyes and goes still. Eager to break the tension, Overgård shuts off the stove and scoops up a generous spoonful of soup. He blows on it several times before carefully maneuvering it to Will’s mouth. His other hand is cupped beneath the plastic spoon to catch any spills.

“You have to try this.” He presses the edge to Will’s lips, but Will stubbornly clenches his jaw. Overgård sighs and withdraws the spoon. “Please. It’s nearly been a day. You need to eat.”

“Ssoup…”

“Yes.”

“Th’meat…?”

“It’s Arctic trout. With noodles,” he adds proudly.

Will’s Adam’s apple bobs as he swallows. “How…?”

“Once you’re able to look out the window, you’ll see. I have lines stationed through the ice outside. The hooks are made from the wire that borders these walls. Then I tie on a lock of my hair. No bait needed.”

“…s’good?”

“I’ve made it this far, haven’t I?” Overgård chuckles, at last understanding Will’s apprehension. “And I *promise* not to eat you…as long as the fish keep biting.”

The slightest smirk perks the corner of Will’s lips. It’s only there for a second, but Overgård mirrors it with his own crooked smile. He’s glad that Will doesn’t ask how long it’s been. In truth, he stopped keeping track once the days marched well into the double digits. No one was looking for him. He was dead to the world…except to Will Graham.

Pausing, he lets that realization take root in the endless static of his mind. It branches out like a tree.

Like antlers.

Overgård produces a new spoonful. “Shall we try again?”

“Yeah...”

Grinning, he blows on the steaming liquid and carefully passes it to Will’s lips. This time they part, and Will gratefully takes in bits of noodle, fish, and broth.

Will slipped back into unconsciousness after their meal, as if the very act of eating had completely exhausted him.

“Will,” Overgård called while jostling the man’s shoulder. He even tried pinching his hand. But Will didn’t stir. The steady rise and fall of his chest was the only indication that he was still alive. Sighing, Overgård found an old scrap of paper and began to write:

I’LL RETURN TO THE PLANE TO CHECK ON YOU SOON

Back at the helicopter, he rifles through the compartments until it drops beside his knees.

A map.

He carefully lays it flat and compares it to his own hand drawn lay of the land. He’s pleased to see that his version lines up surprisingly well with the depicted valley. It takes less than a minute for him to circle the helicopter’s and then the plane’s locations. He can even estimate where the flag, his first makeshift signal, is and jots down a path.

His gaze falls to the small outline of a diamond near the north edge of the map. According to the key, it marks a seasonal station. He frenetically scans the monochrome terrain for anything closer.

The beeping watch puts an end to his fruitless search. Sighing, he gathers up the map and prepares to leave the helicopter for good.

Outside, a small pyramid of black rocks stand vigil over the pilot’s final destination.

The sound of clattering metal hastens his return. He abandons his gear nearby and drops to his knees by the fishing hole. In his haste, he forgets to grab his pickaxe. He’s winded from the run, but the startlingly strong tension on the line gives him a surge of adrenaline. Thankfully, it seems that the fish tired itself out during his absence, so all he needs to do is guide it to the opening.

At last, the fish’s head breaks the surface. Overgård can’t contain his shout of victory as he hoists the huge catch above his head.

Chapter End Notes

A fish a day keeps the cannibalism at bay…

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I wanted to show you, Will," Overgård explains playfully, while stirring the latest batch of instant noodle trout soup. "But you seemed determined to sleep for…a few days, and I couldn't let the fish go to waste."

He removes his knife from the pot and trades it for the canteen. Unscrewing the lid, he tilts the spout toward Will's mouth.

"Drink."

Glacially, Will parts his chapped lips. Overgård carefully lets some water trickle in. With the patience of a saint, he waits for Will to swallow before trying again. After several more times, he sets it aside.

With a deep sigh, he fishes Will's gloved hand from the sleeping bag and clutches it. "Squeeze my hand, Will."

He waits.

He's about to prompt again when he feels a firm pressure fleetingly enclose his fingers. Overgård drops his eyes and nods. "Good."

He stares in silence as Will drifts off again, the soup forgotten and way overcooked. He finally remembers to switch off the stove and reaches for the bottle of antiseptic.

It's day five.

He removes the clothing over Will's wound and peels off yesterday's bandage. He shakes every last drop into the cap and watches the final dose seep into the swollen cut.

There's no point in closing the empty bottle, but he does it anyway and sets it back in its usual place. As he redresses the wound, Overgård's eyes drift to the window above Will's head. On the sill sits the photo of the dogs, where it's been for the past several days. He hopes Will has seen it.

Moving on autopilot, Overgård zips up Will's jacket and sleeping bag, sets his usual handwritten note on the table, gathers his backpack, and starts his wristwatch's timer. But before he ducks his head out the door, he pauses. The soup still sits on the propane stove, growing colder. He takes one last look at Will's ashen face before departing for his daily routine.

While Overgård clears the snow and rocks from his SOS sign, he tries to comfort himself with the recurring fantasy of returning "home" only to find the pot licked clean and the sleeping bag empty. Overgård would search the plane and find Will seated at the back,

expertly tying his own fishing lures. He wouldn't question where Will found the vibrant feathers and scarlet thread. He could finally show Will his ice fishing setup. Perhaps even compete on who can land the largest catch.

Overgård initially chuckles at the thought, but the joviality invariably fades after a few hours of cranking the distress beacon. Today, his efforts slow to a stop. The steady beeping dies out along with the blinking red light.

Engulfed in heavy silence, he turns his head toward the stranded plane in the distance.

To Will.

Dying.

As he's done a million times over, he scans the horizon in every direction.

As always, there's nothing.

Fidgeting, the anxiety builds within him until his legs finally make the decision to get up. The next moment, he finds himself racing back over the frozen lake, backpack and beacon rattling with every step.

Inside the plane, it's just as he feared. Everything is exactly where he left it that morning. He watches Will's steady breathing until he can convince himself that they won't stop. Yet.

Tossing aside his gear and jacket, Overgård retrieves the map from the shelf and lays it across the entire table. Bisecting the landscape is a dotted trail that he plotted out two days ago. It had merely been a hypothetical route, born out of curiosity and boredom. Now he eyes it with sincerity.

Slipping back into his jacket, he trudges through the snow until he reaches the nearest ridge. He squints at the endless expanse. Somewhere in this direction is the station.

An end.

He can almost hear it on the wind. It beckons him, tantalizingly so. Overgård takes in a deep breath.

"Ok."

The remainder of the day is spent in a frantic scramble. He crafts seven more lures and sets up as many new fishing holes. He doesn't stop collecting trout until his stock reaches eight.

Then he collects water, inventories his remaining food, and gathers all the supplies that will fit—the propane stove, the beacon, two flares, rope, and the now tiny roll of gauze.

In between feeding, hydrating, and checking Will's strength, he prepares a note on his last scrap of paper:

2 ALIVE HEADED NORTH TO ♢

H. OVERGÅRD

W. GRAHAM

When night falls, Overgård lies awake from his place on the floor. Eyes closed, he begs his mind to sleep. But anxiety keeps him hopelessly amped up and restless. When light eventually creeps through the windows, he opens his eyes, having failed to sleep a wink.

He's grateful of Will's slightly smaller stature. Any taller, and he would have to leave something behind. He adds an extra sweater under Will's jacket and struggles to zip it back up. He then slides one arm under Will's shoulders and another beneath his knees. Careful not to strain his back, he lifts Will and carries him to the awaiting sled. Then he tucks him into the sleeping bag and fusses over every detail—airway, insulation, comfort… Eventually, Overgård forces himself to step away.

Taking one last scan of the plane's barren interior, he retrieves the photo of Will's dogs from the window and meticulously positions the handwritten note on the table. Sharpie in hand, the only remaining task is to repeat the message on the plane's exterior:

2 ALIVE HEADED NORTH TO ♢

He takes up the sled's handles and begins to pull.

Only a few paces in, he stops and looks over his shoulder.

He looks at safety.

In the end, it *was* his home.

Chapter End Notes

> I'm sure Will would've enjoyed critiquing Overgård's lures and ice fishing setup. Just don't mention something about trout being a very "Nietzschean fish"…
>
> The fateful journey begins!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Overgård is completely winded by the time light begins to fade. Breathing hard, he seats himself in the snow and pulls out the map. Sharpie in hand, he scans the horizon for landmarks and fills in a little more of the path. Looking at the day's progress, it seems promising.

That is, until he unfolds the upper part of the map and grimaces at the distance yet to go. But at this pace, they were only two more days away. Maybe two and a half.

Nodding and muttering encouragements to himself, he grabs his shovel and begins to dig out a shelter.

Bits of fish sizzle on the propane stove. While the heat is on, the makeshift snow cave is warm enough for Will to stretch his limbs atop the open sleeping bag.

Setting aside his spatula of a knife, Overgård suddenly recalls the photo in his pocket and sets it on a ledge in the wall by Will's head. Then he takes Will's hand.

"Ok, here we go. Squeeze."

To his shock, Will tightens his grip immediately.

"That's it, good!" Overgård praises breathlessly, blinking back the dull sting of relief in his eyes. "That's very good…"

For the first time, both their hands are bare for this exercise. It's only until after Overgård lets go that he realizes his thumb was stroking Will's knuckles the entire time. He wonders if Will noticed, but the man's eyes remain closed and his expression calm.

Overgård suddenly feels an overwhelming wave of affection and clears his throat. He shifts his focus back to the fish simmering in the dim glow of the flames. "Here…" He plucks a piece with his fingers and touches it to Will's mouth.

Again, to his surprise and elation, Will accepts the food. He tries not to think about how Will's lips briefly brush against his fingers during the exchange.

Realizing they'll need more, he quickly prepares another fish while Will groggily chews.

After the fifth piece, Will sighs.

"Fish is…taste…less…"

Overgård pauses. It feels like ages since he last heard Will's voice. Though hoarse, the sound is music to his ears. He huffs in amusement and begins eating his share. "Tastes fine to me. Do you have trouble with taste?"

Will furrows his brow. It seems to take him a while to formulate his next words. He begins hesitantly. "My thoughts…aren't often…tasty…"

"Nor mine. No need for barriers. Not here."

"I build…forts…"

"Then associations come quickly."

"So do forts." Will smiles, closed eyes mirthfully creased around the edges.

Overgård grins back and takes a sip of water. "Not fond of eye contact, are you?"

"Too distracting…"

Overgård nods. "Maybe it's for the best. It's been so long since I've seen another human. I don't know if I can even manage it anymore." He notices Will licking his lips and offers the canteen. "Drink."

He does, and for once, Overgård is satisfied with Will's intake of water. With a long sigh, Will sinks back into his sleeping bag. His smile is gone.

"Who…?" Will tilts his head toward him and slightly opens his eyes. "Who do you think you are?"

Overgård frowns. "What?"

But Will snaps his eyes shut and coughs. When the fit doesn't cease, Overgård quickly offers him the canteen again. Will drinks and shakily exhales in relief.

Concern etched into his weary face, Overgård fetches a clean rag from his backpack and dries the excess water from Will's chin. The coughing is new.

"Ok, get some rest," he decides to say, switching off the stove. "Long day tomorrow, but we're doing fine. We'll be fine."

Will's nod is merely a twitch of the head as Overgård zips him into the sleeping bag cocoon. He then settles into his own and lies on his side, facing Will.

Watching and listening to Will's breaths are usually an immense help in lulling Overgård to sleep. Tonight, however, the steady rhythm is interrupted by a dry cough several times an hour.

A tiny red flag flutters pitifully in the blizzard. Overgård sighs as the memories hit him. It feels like years since he's last been here, yet it can't have been…

Dropping to his knees, he wipes away the snow at the flag's base.

1 ALIVE - VALLEY DUE SOUTH

The sight of his own handwriting causes a dull ache in his chest. He was so hopeful the day he wrote it. In the end, it was just another cry for help that went unanswered.

Unnoticed.

He circles the flag's location on the map.

Opening the box, he finds his ID resting on some surplus rope. He smirks, picking it up.

"See, Will?" he says, knowing Will isn't conscious to hear him. His voice is lost to the wind anyway. "Air crew." Looking at his clean-cut, youthful portrait, he chuckles. "That's me, H. Overgård…"

H.

Overgård furrows his brow. He doesn't know why his first name isn't hitting him. The realization that he can't remember startles him.

"It's fine. It's just been so long…" An errant gust nearly knocks him over. He catches himself on his hand and pockets his ID for later. After a moment's contemplation, he dismantles the flagpole and allows it to be lost under the pelting snow.

Overgård stops. Panting, he drops the handles to check the map.

"No…"

Hands shaking, he squints hard at the black printer ink and then back at the nightmare before him.

It's not on the fucking map.

"It's not on the *fucking* map!" he echoes under his breath, desperate to be mistaken. On the verge of hyperventilating, he spreads out the tarp and uses it as a makeshift table.

Taking another account of his surroundings, he fills in his latest progress and circles their location. In his search for a new route, he has to unfold the entire left half of the map. His eyes trace out a possibility, and he dots it in.

Using his thumb and forefinger, he measures out one day's progress and divides the remainder of his original path.

1…

2.

Then he divides the alternate path.

1…

2…

3…

4……

“Five…” He can barely bring himself to say it. The other route is *five* more days. “And it’s on the windy side…”

Overgård stares up at the towering cliff before him.

Chapter End Notes

Still can’t believe they used *that* photo in Arctic.

Also, I’m pretty sure “H” is just a reference to Overgård’s original name Huxley. But the IMDb trivia claims otherwise…

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With one last push, Overgård heaves himself to the top of the cliff. He takes a moment to catch his breath. Then he places both hands on the rope and pulls. Slowly but surely, the skids containing all their supplies creep up the near-vertical rock face.

Finally, he sees metal peeking from over the edge. One last pull and it's there. Overgård flops into the snow, arms like jelly from his own climb and now from pulling up the supplies. He turns his head and looks at the valley beyond. Only two days. Smooth sailing.

Just this one thing.

Just one more thing.

Sitting up, he peers back over the other side. Will is all that remains, bundled in a moss green sleeping bag in the orange sled—a chrysalis fallen from its branch, vulnerable and fading on the forest floor.

Overgård is shouting.

He feels like his teeth will shatter from the force he's putting on his jaw. Everything burns and he throws himself backwards in a desperate fight against his stamina.

He leans forward to grab more of the rope when suddenly his strength falters. The kinetic energy sends him lurching forward. He barely catches himself on the cliff's edge as the sled slides back down.

Recovering from the scare, Overgård takes a moment to come to terms with his wasted energy.

But it's worth it.

It'll be worth it.

Again, he tries. "Halfway" registers dimly in his mind amid the roar of pain. One hand after the other, he pulls and pulls, yelling, screaming.

"COME ON!"

But he feels it. His mind won't accept it. It *won't*.

Trembling violently, he leans forward to grab more rope when it happens again. A blip in his strength throws off his balance and sends him flying toward certain death. Somehow, he

catches himself in time to stop from tumbling over the edge headfirst. The sled slides to a halt at the base.

Overgård punches the cliff.

Halfway.

He pulls and pulls, shouting, screaming, cursing. Anything to distract him from the agony. The pressure on his arms grows exponentially as Will nears the steepest part of the cliff.

Almost.

His hand passes over the other and grabs the rope. His brain screams at his body to pull. It *begs*.

Please, *please*!

He feels the rope sliding inside his white knuckled grip. Slowly, at first.

No—!

He throws his weight back but doesn't make any progress. The strain is so overwhelming that he's forgotten to breathe. He tremulously leans forward to grab more of the rope.

And slips.

"NO!" He miraculously catches himself on the edge and flails for the rope. It whips around in its free fall, and in a second, it's over.

Will slides to a halt at the bottom of the cliff. The sled didn't flip. He seems unharmed. Overgård clings to this knowledge like a lifeline.

Scrambling backwards onto the ledge, he clutches his head and presses his face into the ground. After a long while of nothing but his anguished gasping and griping, he rolls to face the quiet valley.

Marker scratches against paper in one continuous squiggle. Overgård caps the pen and observes his edit. The path through the valley is now completely scratched out. While sitting propped against the sled, he leans his head back and rests it on Will's side.

Eyes closed, Will mumbles incoherently. Overgård turns to him and grins softly.

"We'll take a better way."

As light begins to fade, Overgård spots a small hole in the base of a hill. He makes short work of hollowing out enough space for both of them.

Later that night, he heats some water in his canteen and transfers the simmering fish stew into a tray. The grim silence is peppered with Will's dry coughs. Overgård plucks out a chunk with his fingers and presses it to Will's mouth.

Will doesn't move.

"No…" He places two fingers under Will's chin to gently turn him toward the food. "You have to eat, Will. You have to try." He again touches the food to Will's lips, but there's no attempt.

Overgård sets the meat aside and grabs the canteen. He presses the edge of the spout to Will's mouth and pours just a little. Some of it spills down his cheek.

Will groans softly and twists his head away. Overgård pushes Will's beanie up, smooths away his greasy bangs, and places a calloused palm on his forehead.

He's burning up.

As he removes his hand, he feels a slight ridge. Squinting in the low light, he can barely make out a perfectly horizontal scar on the right of Will's forehead.

Odd. He never noticed it before, though it *is* faint. Easily missable.

He absentmindedly traces the line with his finger before covering it back under the beanie.

With a heavy sigh, he sits back and begins to slurp at his soup. Suddenly, he craves butter. It would certainly pair well with the meat.

"Wht'sfrdnnr…?"

Overgård nearly chokes. Swallowing hard, he smiles. "Never ask. Spoils the surprise."

The corner of Will's mouth twitches.

Overgård fishes a plastic spoon from his backpack. It's the last one they have. Just like their first meal together, he scoops up some broth, blows on it, and tips it into Will's barely parted mouth.

Will grimaces as he swallows and coughs. "Ssp isn' vry ghd…"

"Think of it as more for my sake than yours," Overgård remarks, holding out a new spoonful. "Have another sip."

Will reluctantly does. But he turns away when Overgård offers another one. With a sigh, Overgård sets the spoon aside. Suddenly, a notion hits him and he reaches for his pocket.

"Oh, Will—" Overgård fishes out his ID and holds it before Will's face. "See?"

Will blinks slowly, unperturbed.

“I know it may be hard to believe…” Overgård brushes at a smudge on the plastic protector. “But that’s me.”

For a long moment, Will merely stares. Overgård watches him. For once, Will’s expression doesn’t seem blank, though he’s not exactly lucid. Yet there’s purpose behind those eyes, which subtly flick back and forth to take in a scene that his overheating brain has laid out before him. Finally, he murmurs a single word:

“…m’stro.”

Brow wrinkled in confusion, Overgård withdraws his ID.

But before he can inquire, Will tilts his head toward the cave’s entrance. “We expectin’ company…?”

That’s when Overgård hears it.

A thump.

He freezes.

All is silent. Then there are three more thumps, each getting louder. Closer. Snow crunches under an immense weight.

ID forgotten on the ground, Overgård closes his fingers around the pickaxe. His free hand is placed protectively on Will’s arm. A low grumble reverberates through the cave, rattling him to his core. Large claws scratch at the rocks above until finally its snout appears in the entrance.

Overgård yells and lunges forth. The polar bear recoils but doubles back furiously. With a paw nearly as wide as the sled, it punches through the opening and surges in.

Panicked, he grabs a flare and yanks the string. Halfway into the cave, the bear pauses. Overgård’s hollering is primeval, harkening to a time when humans were as much prey as they were predators. He shoves the sparking flare into its face. The bear winces and begins to back up. Overgård doesn’t relent until the polar bear is sent running. He tosses the wasted flare after it. Smoke chokes his lungs and burns his eyes, but he’s too distraught to care.

From his likely fatal failure at the cliff to now the trauma of this attack, he suddenly becomes completely overtaken by stress. Hyperventilating, he withdraws deep into the cave and huddles next to Will.

“It’s ok… It’s ok…” Overgård whispers over and over, hugging himself and then pushing the heels of his hands into his eyes.

Outside, the flare flickers and peters out to nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Time for the “angst” tag to kick in…

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The wind is getting worse. Overgård would laugh at such an understatement. He expected the weather to be bad on this side, but nothing could have prepared him for the feeling of ice in his eyes, so relentless that it burned him to blindness, and a wind shear so vicious, it skinned him of any and all body heat.

Yet he stubbornly trudges on until he finds himself waist-deep in snow.

He lifts Will from the sled and carefully sets him on the ground. With far less care, he upturns the sled against the wind, their supplies spilling everywhere, and anchors it with a pole. He drags Will and the sleeping bag back against the sled, combines it with his own sleeping bag, and crams himself inside. He wastes no time closing the zipper up and over their heads.

Slow to recover from the penetrating cold, Overgård shivers. With the howling winds somewhat muffled, all that remains are the sounds of his and Will's shuddering breaths. He stares at Will, who is also lying on his side and gazing back through half-lidded eyes. He feels Will's body weakly trembling as they lie pressed up against each other.

Guilt strikes Overgård through his heart. Had he realized Will was this cold, he would've stopped much sooner.

He wants to comfort him, say something, hold him—anything. But his tongue, arms, and legs are simultaneously too numb and too sore to move.

As the snow continues to engulf them, it also happens to improve their insulation. Eventually, the meager warmth from their bodies is enough to dull the worst of the biting cold. Will's eyes flicker shut as his shivering gradually subsides. Overgård watches him drift, treasuring each wavering breath from Will's body.

As exhaustion drags Overgård under, he notes, in the darkness, that they are sharing the same air. Once he's sure Will is asleep, he cranes his neck and closes the gap between their foreheads.

After unburying themselves and their supplies, Overgård continues the trek. But the deep snow and accumulating fatigue greatly hinder their progress. He finds himself having to stop several times an hour to catch his breath or warm and massage his cramped, near-frostbitten hands.

The grueling day comes to a close. Too tired to dig out a shelter, Overgård finds refuge by a boulder. To the right burns a few rags, in lieu of their depleted propane stove. He kneels beside Will and tilts in a little water. Most of it overflows from his constantly parted mouth.

He can't tell if Will is even drinking. Heart in his throat, he sets aside the canteen and cradles Will's hand.

"Squeeze," he murmurs. And waits. "Squeeze."

He searches Will's face for any sign that he's there.

"*Squeeze,*" is his final plea, a sob. But there's nothing.

He slowly sets down Will's hand and closes up the sleeping bag.

Overgård rests far off to the side, unable to listen any longer to the death rattle in Will's throat. As the night wanes on, he gets no sleep as his mind creeps ever closer to a decision.

When day breaks, he returns to Will's side. Eyebrows upturned, Overgård unzips the entire sleeping bag and takes in the sight.

Will is still breathing, but only just. The skin around his eyes is frighteningly dark—a telltale sign of severe head trauma, as if the light sensitivity, immobility, and frequent loss of consciousness weren't signs enough. A spot of black liquid leaks from the corner of his mouth. Both are in stark contrast to his pale, gray skin.

Overgård unzips Will's jacket and exposes his abdomen. Red, inflamed skin expands beyond the days-old covering of gauze. Somehow the wound seems wider than before, starting from one side of his stomach and arcing up toward his now jutting ribs on the other.

He covers it back up and reaches for the photo in Will's jacket pocket. His eyes gloss over the many dogs sitting obediently on the porch. For the first time, he gets the idea to check the back and finds a small note scribbled in the lower left corner.

Welcome home, Winston! 4/4/13

Flipping to the pictured side, his eyes are automatically drawn to the long-haired auburn dog sitting at the center. Head tilted, it stares at him with expressive eyes and floppy ears.

Overgård positions Will's hands over his softly wheezing chest and places the folded photo in his grasp. His eyes then flick to Will's face, and he removes his glove. With his bare thumb, he gently wipes away the dead blood from Will's lips. Then his knuckles slowly brush down the side of Will's face, from cheekbone to jawline, in one final act of comfort.

With an ache constricting his throat, Overgård zips up the coffin and steps away. He keeps glancing over his shoulder while gathering up his supplies and tethering them to the bare skids.

The sight already haunts him.

Picking up the handles, Overgård begins his departure. With each step comes a dull pang to his head and heart. The ease of the trek feels *wrong.*

Yet it's simple enough to hide behind excuses of unfathomable exhaustion and weeks of doomed efforts. It simply wasn't meant to be. Fate has made that excruciatingly obvious. No one would blame him.

So he walks on.

Color catches his eye. He looks down.

A single patch of purple is sprouting from the snow.

He pauses, staring at the delicate, yet incongruous, lavender petals.

His mind is abruptly struck by another impossibility—a blossoming tree growing amid asphalt. Grafted into the center is a man, his chest split open. And from splayed ribs bloom belladonna, white oleander, and ragwort.

Theater.

Overgård shakes the ridiculous image from his head.

He doesn't notice the ice cracking under his feet until it bursts. With a gasp, he plummets straight to Hell.

Chapter End Notes

I thought the credits were about to roll when this happened and it held on the empty shot. Thankfully not, but the relief was a *bit* short lived…

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Overgård groans. It takes a long time for his senses to return. As his eyes regain focus, he realizes that he's somehow upright, with the front of him propped against a sheared rock. There's a throbbing sting on his cheekbone where it's undoubtedly been scraped. Tentatively, he tries to move.

"Ah!" He winces. Something is pinching his right shin. He tries to rotate and shift the other way, but whatever's trapping him refuses to budge. He falls to his back and sees that the lower part of his leg is wedged deep into a crevice.

Craning his neck, he takes in the sight of the small underground cave. From the opening he fell through, the sun's rays shine down on him like a spotlight.

Like *theater*.

He scoffs bitterly.

Bracing his hands on the rock and wherever he can reach, he returns to the awful task of trying to tug himself free. Eventually, his grunts of pain unravel into resentful laughs of hysteria. He drops onto his back, mumbling deliriously.

Gazing at the ceiling, his fractured psyche tries to process this new reality. But there's nothing to understand. It just *is*.

And it's *shit.*

After the fury comes unadulterated sorrow. Truly alone for the first time in days, he lets himself drown in it, eyes watering and chest seizing with misery.

No…

Not here…

Not like this…

Not like……

Numb. He feels numb.

Lifting an arm, he notices that his right glove was lost during the fall. There are streaks of fresh blood on his bare hand. He idly raises it until it obscures the light above him.

Peering through the gaps between his fingers, he observes how the blinding sun is tempered by thick cloud cover. It almost looks like the moon. A full moon. The backlit blood on his

hand darkens and desaturates to an intriguing hue. His eyes flick to his thumb where the smear of Will's blood remains.

…black.

He stares.

From his mouth spills a whisper. It happens as naturally as a sigh.

"…in the moonlight."

At once, the earsplitting static cuts off. What lingers is the echo of a faint hum until that, too, dwindles into nothing.

The silence is euphoric.

……strange……

...seeing you here in front of me……

"Will?"

…been staring at…afterimages of you…

The voice is murky, as if spoken from a thousand leagues under the sea. The slightest lapse in concentration, and he loses it. Overgård squeezes his eyes shut and desperately tries to focus.

To listen.

He stumbles and flails in pitch darkness. These words and the space they filled…it all seems so achingly familiar. He's home—he *must* be—yet he can't see, and someone has moved all the furniture around.

"Wait." He tries to walk toward the voice, his own erratic footfalls crunching through autumn leaves, and collides with a gate. His fingers wrap around the cold metal bars. "I don't…" He jostles it in frustration, but of course it won't give. "I can't remember—!"

A chuckle. Footsteps take their sweet time sauntering up to the gate from the other side.

Even if you saw me everyday…?

He opens his eyes.

The presence leaves, and with it goes the warmth. All is quiet once more.

From his place on the cave floor, he indulges in one last moment of blissful peace. Then he slowly lifts his body as far forward as he can go.

—and throws himself backwards.

“AHH!” he screams. White hot pain shoots up his leg and reduces him to a writhing mess. But the worst of it passes a few punishing seconds later, and he quickly drags himself up for another go.

He hears the bone snap before he feels it.

Whimpering and on the verge of passing out, he braces his quaking hands on the ground and makes one final push. Despite the series of cracking sounds, he keeps pushing until he lands on his side, right leg finally free.

The climb out of the Inferno is pitifully slow. He begins on his hands and knees, crawling inch by inch, before collapsing to his side. He dimly notices his lost glove within reach and snatches it up. Next, he hobbles using the jagged ledge as a crutch until he can find a wide enough area to climb up on. The slightest bump to his crippled leg paralyzes him with agony. But he doesn’t cry out. Not anymore. He simply breathes and allows it to pass.

Finally.

Finally…

He emerges on Earth’s surface. Rolling onto his back, he clutches his throbbing leg and squints at the blinding sunlit snow. Although it’s a different opening from where he fell, it’s not far from his supplies and…

He rises precariously on his good foot and begins the dreadful task of limping back. Once he sees the boulder, he crawls the rest of the way and doesn’t stop until he reaches the sleeping bag. A thin trail of blood marks his journey.

Settling beside Will, he opens the zipper and adjusts the photo in Will’s hand until Winston is visible.

A strained wheeze gives him pause.

He turns.

Will stares back at him through tired, teal blue eyes. He waits until their focus is solely on each other before exhaling two words in the faintest of whispers:

“…hello… ……Hannibal…”

His eyes widen. The final precious key clicks into place and the towering gates to his memory palace—yes, *his* memory palace—his *home*—in all its beautiful, grotesque, baroque glory—open to him. He quickly crosses the gilded threshold, races down the fractal labyrinth of doors and hallways—

And *sees*.

“Hello… *Will*.”

A slight, wry smile graces Will's lips, and he *knows.* Of *course* he knows. That empath... Smarter and more conniving than anyone was ever willing to admit.

Yet here he is, dying, from that same "smile" he once left him with.

And he *did* leave him. Again.

"Will." Bitter tears well in his warm brown eyes. "I'm sorry…" he whispers shakily, reaching for Will's hands and clutching them. "I'm *sorry*...!" Collapsing under the weight of the admission, he presses his face to them—the hands he once fantasized about dying to, the hands he once mended so tenderly and reverently...

I'm alone in that darkness.

"You… You're not alone, Will." He takes in a sharp, shuddering breath. "*I'm standing right beside you*."

Will is silent.

When Hannibal lifts his head, he sees that Will has once again been stolen from him by unconsciousness. After returning the photo to Will's pocket and tucking his arms back into the sleeping bag, Hannibal tightens the ropes and, with an agonized shout, begins pushing the sled toward the skids.

Chapter End Notes

Whew. Had to make sure I didn't accidentally type "Hannibal" instead of "Overgård" until now.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With nothing but snow to clot his blood and a scarf to hold his flesh and splintered fibula together, Hannibal limps on. His crutch of a pole stabs deep into the loose snow with each uneven step. All of the weight bears down on his waist from which he pulls, like an overworked mule, via the belt that's secured to the sled's handles.

Will's frail coughing stops him in his tracks.

After unhooking the belt, he crawls to Will's side and tilts the canteen to his mouth. Hardly any water trickles out. A sudden gust whisks away the rest of the precious droplets, along with the tarp he forgot to secure. Hannibal watches it go.

Then he picks up some snow and shoves it into the canteen. He stuffs another handful into his parched mouth.

Now comes the part he dreads most.

He pulls out the map. Pen in hand, he traces a wobbly line over their path so far.

The line stops pitifully short.

They're not even a quarter of the way there.

Before he can think about it, he pockets the map and struggles to his feet.

The rest of the day continues at the same torturous pace.

He limps on and on. But the number of times he trips and falls is increasing exponentially. His broken leg throbs unbearably, and he laments at how acute his perception of pain is in this world.

Hours tick by until it all comes to a screeching halt the moment he reaches an incline.

He manages to lurch and claw halfway up the slope, but the next step—and then the next—merely sinks him further into the snow.

He knows they can't make it.

Hannibal sits, staring at the white sky. The back of his head rests on Will's side.

"Any *theories* as to what 'Circle of Hell' this is, doctor?"

Hannibal could cry at the achingly familiar sound of that voice, even if it's only a construct of his crumbling mind. He smirks. Anyone else who addressed him with such snark would've long since gotten their neck snapped and their tongue sautéed—and not necessarily in that order. He can already see Will, in his typical atrocious flannel, pacing around his office, hands in his jeans pockets, eyes on the crackling fireplace.

"It's certainly not one I've studied…though perhaps we can draw similarities to the Ninth Circle's Cocytus, a frozen lake at the lowest point in Hell, where betrayers spend their eternal damnation locked in ice."

Apparition Will scoffs. "Of course…" He fiddles with the scalpel on Hannibal's desk. "And this 'Overgård' fellow?"

"I killed him," Hannibal answers too quickly. "Or…more accurately, I failed to inform him about an issue with his plane, but it felt like I killed him."

Will lifts an eyebrow.

"It's true." Hannibal chuckles. "Right before he went missing, I saw the opportunity to hide in his place. But doing so required me to assume his traits for a while." Hannibal is silent for a long moment. "Resilience, I can understand. But altruism? It never occurred to me that a person could be so genuinely grounded in virtue." He smiles wistfully. "In a way, you surprised me in this regard as well."

"I guess now you know how it feels," Will remarks, idly flipping through the notebook he once scrawled a clock in, "to get *so close* to someone that you completely lose sight of who you are." With one hand, he snaps it shut and sets it back onto the desk. "Can't believe you're still struggling to get back."

Hannibal tilts his head. "Why do you say that?"

Will pauses his aimless sauntering and lets out an exasperated sigh. He removes a hand from his pocket and absentmindedly taps it on the desk. That habit has always endeared Hannibal. "What I'm trying to say is…what are you doing?"

"I'm trying to save you."

"Why?"

You know why is his gut response, but he refrains from saying it. The truth caught at the back of his throat, Hannibal hesitates. It's senseless…to be ashamed of confessing to a figment of his imagination. But he feels the humiliation all the same.

Perhaps there is merit to his shame. Their palaces do share rooms, after all.

"I don't…" Hannibal's wavering voice trails off. He feels himself spiraling and sneers at his own pathetic state. His upper lip twitches in bitter frustration. "*I don't know what's happening*."

"Or what's *going* to happen?"

And that's the kicker, isn't it? Even after decades of devout study into the matter (and sending his fair share of souls to go first), in the end, he's at a loss as to what truly happens after death.

Are they dead? When *did* they die? How *can* they be when everything—each sandpaper breath, the lactic acid on torn muscle, the dizzying fatigue, the stinging tears, the *blood*—feels so painfully and viscerally *alive?* Somehow, somewhere, their hearts beat on. Dim…but fast, as Will once confided. Like footsteps fleeing into silence…

"What do you fear most, Hannibal?"

Eyes downcast, Hannibal smirks. The answer is so excruciatingly obvious yet so hard to admit. Perhaps this is their curse: to stubbornly rely on the assumption that the other already knows. They could never just say things plainly, could they? Always obscuring. Always prevaricating.

Sins of omission…

Hannibal blinks and he's back on that cursed slope. He twists toward the sled, grabs their empty water tank, and tosses it to the ground. Next to go is his backpack. Then their food tray. Then his pickaxe and ropes.

He holds his distress beacon and giggles.

So many hours and days wasted on this.

So much wasted *time*.

"*But in the end, it's what led me to you…*" murmurs Will's voice in the wind.

Hannibal discards the damned device into the snow and sits, staring at nothing. There's nothing left to throw.

After a while, he decides to at least crawl to the top of the hill. Just to see. And that's when he hears it.

The distant beating of blades.

Hannibal can hardly believe his eyes. For a moment, he merely stares, afraid to blink. He expects the hallucination to fizzle out like an oasis in the horizon.

But it doesn't.

The helicopter lands on a rocky outcrop several hundred meters away.

The next moment, he's sliding back down the hill. He quickly dismantles the handles from the sled and begins to push.

“They’re here, Will. They’re here,” he says between heaves, fighting to advance while on his hands and knees. At last, he feels the sled level out at the top of the slope.

Eyeing the two figures beside the helicopter, he begins to shout. But they don’t hear him. With his teeth, he pulls off his gloves and procures their last flare from his jacket. His hands are too numb to grasp the string, so he hooks a gnarled finger through the loop and pulls.

Struggling to both feet, he holds the sparking flare high above his head and waves it around. Yet they don’t see him.

Time running out, he tears off his jacket and sets it alight with the flare. Then he grabs his walking pole from the sled and skewers the flaming mass. He strains to raise it as high as he can.

And *still* they don’t *see*.

They never did.

With the fire cast aside, Hannibal rips open Will’s sleeping bag as their last hope boards the helicopter. He hears it take off, but he doesn’t stop. Hooking his elbows under Will’s armpits, he pulls until his beloved is completely free from the sled. Will’s upper body leans limply against Hannibal’s chest and his head rolls back across his shoulder. Hannibal nuzzles the side of his face against Will’s as he holds him.

They sit like this. He can feel Will’s heart barely beating. So faintly.

Still *alive*.

Hannibal sniffs, and now with nothing to hold him back, he cries. Tears drip freely from bloodshot eyes. He doesn’t bother looking for the helicopter anymore. All that remains is a distant beat of the propeller growing softer and softer.

“You’re the only one…Will,” Hannibal tells him. “The only one who knows me. *Sees* me.” He curls his darkened fingers into fists as grief wracks his body. “Not even Mischa—“

Hannibal’s failing voice is no more than a whisper. But he knows Will is listening. He knows Will hears him. With a stuttering breath, he begins his final confession.

“What I fear most…is losing you *forever*…Will…” He feels his body shutting down with every word. Tightening his grip, he braces against the waves of unconsciousness that threaten to pull them apart. “I can wait. As long as it takes, I promise… I’ll wait here for you…”

It takes everything to force out the final bitter truth—the most painful of them all.

“……but I can’t promise you *forever.*”

Will opens his mouth to respond. Despite the futility, he tries to draw in enough air to fuel his inflamed vocal cords. Yet what leaves his throat is scarcely a whimper.

Panic seizes Will at the prospect of it ending like this. Then, against all odds, his damaged mind grants him one more epiphany. He jerkily cranes his neck back and silently implores Hannibal to join him halfway.

Their eyes meet.

Drowning in empathy, Hannibal suddenly places both frostbitten hands on the sides of Will's face and kisses him. His cracked lips leave a scarlet mark on Will's mouth.

"Can you hear me…? It's ok…it's ok…" Hannibal sighs, their foreheads touching.

But the words he speaks are not his own—they are his beloved's.

"*...you're not alone*."

Hannibal blinks. Upon regaining his senses, his bleeding lips draw back into a devilish smile.

A tremor passes through Will, and he grins. Then, as he once did, baptized by a sea of blood and bathed in moonlight, he relaxes into Hannibal's embrace and makes peace with his fate.

On his cheek appears the final, beautiful scar.

The world turns sideways as Hannibal's strength gives out like the severing of his strings. They lie together in the snow. It's warm.

Then the wind picks up, howling and swirling and roaring.

Hannibal rushes to shut every window in the palace until all that remains is the sweet silence of still air. Clothed in his favorite bespoke suit and restored to his former glory, he arrives in the foyer—severe, beautiful, and timeless—and stands over their single reminder of mortality.

He closes his eyes.

Alone in that darkness, he reaches out.

Stay with me.

From deep within the bone arena of his skull, he listens for the most beloved of voices.

And waits.

Please…

At first, there's nothing. Then he feels it—a slight pressure to his fingers.

Will’s hand closes over Hannibal’s.

“Where else would I go?”

Chapter End Notes

Will was absolutely waiting for Hannibal to say “please” first.

It was an interesting challenge to see how much I could make Arctic “work” in the Hannibal universe. The original idea was basically “Arctic as a metaphor for the show.” Then I tried to see how far I could push the overlapping themes while still staying true to both stories. First fanfic, too, so thanks for bearing with me!

If you’re in need of something happy: the helicopter came back quickly enough in the movie, so I think Overgård and the woman survived…which means the murder husbands also managed to survive this trial. Plus they learned a few invaluable lessons along the way.

As for this world’s Overgård, he’s technically just “missing and presumed dead.” Knowing him, that means he’s probably stuck on a deserted island, getting a tan, sipping on coconuts, grilling seafood, surfing, etc—just living his best, bushcraft life.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!